

David Lyle Jeffrey

Medieval Monsters

This article notes the widespread occurrence of manlike monsters in the literature and myth of medieval Europe and describes the two explanations of such monsters current at the time. One school, represented by Augustine's *The City of God*, maintained that monsters were "part of the deliberate diversity of Creation"; the other, of Northern European origin, considered monsters to be "embodiments of evil forces." With special reference to the Anglo-Saxon *Beowulf*, the author examines how the merging of the two attitudes as Northern Europe was Christianized led to modification of the popular conception of manlike monsters.

To anthropologists interested in Sasquatch and related phenomena, it may well appear capricious to try to set in relationship to the modern North American myth-maker a medieval science of Old World monsters, even humanoid monsters. Yet if we can eschew for a moment the seductiveness of a simple evolutionary hypothesis and adopt the less ambitious methods of the literary *comparatiste*, I believe that we may discover in the literature and art of the European Middle Ages an engaging introduction to one or two aspects of the present study.

There are two traditions with regard to monsters in the Middle Ages. One is descended from the humane anthropology of St. Augustine, who regarded all reported physiological aberrations, whether individual or of a whole group of peoples, as part of the deliberate diversity of creation in which each rational being is still descended from Adam. The other tradition is more northerly European, later, and influenced by Germanic sources, and it developed stories about monstrous humanoids who are embodiments of evil forces. As these mythologies were Christianized, the Germanic monsters became "descendants of Cain," or evidences of miscreance in the history of the family, embodiments of the perversion of blood relationship and family history. These divergent traditions come together colourfully in the romance literature of the Middle Ages. In the pages which follow I will highlight certain features of the Germanic development against the background of Christian tradition with special reference to the Anglo-Saxon epic poem

Beowulf. In the process I hope to offer an introductory guide to the spiritual history of what we might think of as a kind of unhappy “medieval Sasquatch.”

In his monumental treatise *The City of God*, Augustine dealt with a number of essentially anthropological questions. One of these was: *An ex propagine Adam vel filiorum Noe quaedam genera hominum monstrosa prodierint* (Liber XVI, cap. 8), which begins .:

It is also asked whether we are to believe that certain monstrous races of men, spoken of in secular history, have sprung from Noah’s sons, or rather, I should say, from that one man from whom they themselves were descended. For it is reported that some have one eye in the middle of the forehead; some, feet turned backwards from the heel; some, a double sex, the right breast like a man, the left like a woman . . . ; others are said to have no mouth, and to breathe only through their nostrils; others are but a cubit high, and are therefore called by the Greeks “Pigmies”—they also say that in some places women conceive in their fifth year and do not live beyond their eighth. . . . Others are said to have no head, having their eyes in their shoulders.

As he continued in this fashion, with reference to “other human or quasi-human races [such as] are depicted in mosaic in the harbour esplanade of Carthage,” Augustine observed two points of reference for dealing with the question of all creatures which are extraordinary: the first is a skeptical reservation that “we are not bound to believe all we hear of these monstrosities”; the second is an affirmation, by faith, of the essential humanity which must pertain to such creatures:

But whoever is born anywhere a man, that is, a rational mortal animal, no matter what unusual appearance he presents in colour, movement, sound, nor how peculiar he is in some power, part, or quality of his nature, no Christian can doubt that he springs from that one protoplast. We can distinguish the common human nature from that which is peculiar and therefore wonderful.¹

It is this affirmation of faith which enabled Augustine to proceed, in a typical medieval argument by classes, to argue that the same sort of explanation which can be given for monstrous births in individual cases can be

given for whole sub-species of monstrous races: all are part of a created diversity which God's perspective reconciles to the beauty of the whole. Yet the question of the actual existence of whole races or tribes of sub-species men is one over which some skepticism must, for Augustine, still rule. Thus, while his creational anthropology could account for a wide degree of variation in creatures who are human (*rationis capax*), he left himself the skeptics' loophole and concluded with a two-step logical shuffle that would do credit to any academic lawyer or politician:

We are supposing these stories about various races who differ from one another and from us to be true; but possibly they are not: for if we were not aware that apes, monkeys and sphinxes are not men, but beasts, those historians would possibly describe them as races of men, and flaunt with impunity their false and vainglorious "discoveries." But supposing they are men of whom these marvels are recorded, what if God has seen fit to create some races in this way, that might we not suppose that the monstrous births which appear among ourselves are the failures of that wisdom whereby he fashions the human nature, as we speak of the failure of a less perfect workman? Accordingly, it might not seem absurd to us that as in individual races there are monstrous births, so in the whole race there are monstrous races. Wherefore, to conclude this question cautiously and guardedly, either these things which have been told of some races have no existence at all; or, if they do exist, they are not human races; or, if they are human, they are descended from Adam.²

It is with these various angles of advantage in mind, both skeptical and fidestic together, that we can see how Augustine's caginess grew to be central to the early medieval tradition of lore about aberrations and sub-species of *genus humanum*. If a phenomenon is somewhere discovered, it exists, and must be part of creation's plan. If it is discovered to be part of the family, *genus humanum*, then it is to be accorded all of the appropriate sympathies, however curious or even grotesque a departure from the normal creature is involved. This is as true for "normal" physiological curiosities as it is for dog-headed men, headless men, or hairy wild men.

At the philosophical level, the enquiry into humanoid but aberrant creatures became a problem in the study of geography—or perhaps we should say, it embraced the evaluation of information which purported to be geographical and anthropological.

Much of the earliest of this kind of work inclines merely to vague attri-

butions: "travellers say," "it is reported," "X is reported to have seen," and so on. Strabo, before Augustine, was frankly cynical: "Generally speaking," he says, those who have written about such things "were a pack of liars . . . it was they who coined the fables concerning men with ears large enough to sleep in, men without mouths . . . etc."³ Following Augustine's more liberal views, nevertheless, one sees a growing interest in actual geographical knowledge on the part of medieval writers. In England the subject seems to have been fostered by Alfred the Great's Anglo-Saxon translation of Orosius in the ninth century.⁴ This work, really an historical compendium aimed at the "lessons of history," follows in the tradition of Strabo, Pliny, Gellius, and Solinus and is itself followed by a host of later medieval encyclopedic works which take increasingly conspicuous note of unusual humanoids. Yet as this work proceeds it becomes less clear that the monstrous creatures may so easily be embraced as part of human kind. From the tenth and eleventh centuries MS Tiberius B.v and MS Cotton Vitellius A.xv, both in the British Library, contain versions of a well-illustrated book of these curiosities which M.R. James has edited under the title "Marvels of the East."⁵ The illustrations from the Vitellius manuscript, which also contains the Anglo-Saxon epic *Beowulf*, are not quite so clearly drawn as those in the Tiberius manuscript, but they follow the same programme in illustrating a menagerie of monsters who are clearly humanoid, plausibly *rationis capax*, yet which are figures of increasingly profound estrangement from the tolerant inclusions of St. Augustine. Both the variants of the *cynocephali*, the dog-headed Christopher creatures to whom Ratramus accorded the capacity of reason⁶ (Augustine was here a bit more tentative) and one with a lion's head (Plate 10), seem curiously less frightening to the illustrator than does the fish-eating swamp man, inhabitant of fens, or especially the man-eating *pyrs* (Plate 11), whose figure bears so much relationship to the description of Grendel and his nocturnal feasting in *Beowulf*.⁷

Of these latter creatures, later medieval encyclopedias struggle awkwardly with the question of their humanity. Can anything so apparently inhuman be human? Such beings are treated, along with other monsters, in Vincent of Beauvais' thirteenth-century *Speculum Naturale* and *Speculum Historiale* as though they were part of the history of the dissemination of the human race,⁸ but Bartholomaeus Anglicus, in his *De Proprietatibus Rerum*, put his list of the various "marvels" ambiguously in his eighteenth book, which deals with animals.⁹ Adam of Bremen found such monsters, as did Augustine, to be rightly classified with the human species, and he transplants all known varieties to northern Europe in his history of the diocese of Hamburg, written in 1072.¹⁰ Rudolf Wittkower has shown that various monsters get included in natural histories from Thomas of Cantimpré to Conrad of

Megensburg,¹¹ and indeed, they enter even into medical histories of the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries.

Apart from literary references, humanoid monsters are recorded in sculpture, such as the early twelfth-century tympanum at Vézelay, in which a representation of Christ's command to "go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature" has rays of light extending out from Christ through the apostles to the peoples of the world, among whom are represented the "fabulous races." Another similar work of sculpture exists at the Cathedral of Autun, also twelfth-century, executed by the famous sculptor Ghisalbertus; this work affords examples, in a less optimistic context, of some of these creatures. Interestingly, the hairy woodman, or *pyrs*, present among the hellish figures at Autun, is not among the "tribes at the end of the earth" portrayed at Vézelay. The real issue, it seems, is not whether our humanoid monsters are merely *rationis capax*, but whether they are capable of redemption—capable therefore not only of reason but of having the virtues of *homo compassionis capax*. As late as Mandeville's *Travels* one of the stories attributed to the life of St. Anthony the Great has him meeting a satyr who asks him to pray for him¹²—so we see that there is a tradition of redeemable monsters until virtually the end of the Middle Ages. The more skeptical and negative views come after that. Dr. Nicolaus Tulp, for example, the Amsterdam physician portrayed in Rembrandt's "Anatomy Lesson," included in his medical treatise *Observationum Medicarum* a section on physiological monstrosities in which he discusses *homo silvestris* under the heading *Satyrus Indicus*, but he came to the conclusion, as if deliberately mirroring Augustine, that either satyrs do not exist, or, if they do, they must in fact be the orang-outang. For Tulp, the practical conclusion is as indicative as Augustine's, if opposite: redemption is not at issue, since those humanoids available for examination seem not to be human.¹³

Somewhere between these two poles, but much closer to the first, lives the *eoten* or *pyrs* of Germanic saga. A rough, hairy, gorilla-like, oversized humanoid, it figures under many names and guises in oral and written literature of the Germanic peoples from the hoary and hungry trolls of northern children's tales to the violent antagonists of *Beowulf*, those "stalkers of shadows" and "inhabitants of the misty marsh," Grendel and his dam. Some of the names given to such creatures are indicative of an initially more benign (or at least morally neutral) character, which has been assigned to a few of them in European mythology. The water-sprite figure, for example, or the woodwose, Old English *wudwasa*, *wodemwose*, was a hairy, shaggy creature, sometimes depicted as overgrown with moss, having human characteristics, but not necessarily evil.¹⁴ On the other hand, there is a *walt man*, *homo silvestris*, often associated, naturally enough, with wild women, *wildez wîp*.

The *walt man* is nevertheless (or perhaps consequently) of a more negative moral character: the Old Norse *íviðr*, used to describe the latter, may, as Grimm noted, signify *malus*, *perversus*, or *dolosus*.¹⁵ Another name emerges: of *íviðjur* and *iarnviðjur* little is known, but the *skôgs-ra* (in Sweden *skogs-nerte*, *skogsnuſva*) clearly has at least some protected valence in a moral order and is part of a chthonic ecology.¹⁶ As Old High German *scînleih* (*monstrum*) or Anglo-Saxon *scînlâc* (*portentum*), the identification is made explicit.¹⁷ There is not, however, any legitimate connection in philology between “Sasquatch” and *skôgs-ra*.

Grendel and his dam have both a moral valence and an intellectual character. They are not only *rationis capax*, but also they are moral agents of a sort that makes them responsible participants in the human ethos. This much may be gathered as easily from the names and adjectives by which they are described as from their disconcerting antisocial thought and behaviour. The nightly depredations on the Scandinavian clan of Hrothgar, in which Grendel cannibalized his way to notoriety until defeated by Beowulf, are well known and need no special rehearsal here. But his character as a malevolent version of the *skôgs-ra* or *homo silvestris* bears special attention with respect to establishing a place for such figures in the anthropological lore of Northern Europe. For Grendel and his mother have a clearly human tradition: monsters they are, but they are not wholly outside the human condition. We see this in the use of two principal appellations, *eoten* and *pyrs*, both of which mean basically “giant” but have connotations that reach back through Germanic lore to Augustine’s discussions in *The City of God*, and a third name, *feond*.

pyrs, which occurs to describe Grendel only once (*Beowulf*, line 846), occurs frequently in the poetic Edda and is described by the *Menologium* as a creature who dwells alone in the inland fens or marshes: *pyrs sceal on fenne gewunian ana innan lande*.¹⁸ But there is a sense here also of deliberate antagonism to divine order. *pyrs* is glossed in Old High German as *orcus duris* (*orcus-demon*), so that while it is true, as Karl Helm put it, that “die Etymologie des Wortes ist unsicher,” the moral associations of *pyrs* are fairly evident.¹⁸ While in southern stories he is occasionally good-natured, in northern stories he is black, hairy, bristly, and always less than hospitable (to put the matter gently). Thor is the enemy of such giants in Scandinavian mythology, which include the *fangboði*, *bergrísar*, and *bergjarlar* (mountain rulers).²⁰ N.K. Keissling has made the point that the adjective *mære*, by which Grendel is also described (lines 103, 762), is more or less correlative, meaning not “notorious,” as it is sometimes translated (as *mæra* with a long diphthong), but *mæra*, meaning *incubus*, or night-monster, also glossed as *pilosi*, hairy ones.²¹ Therefore, as Grimm said, “there is no clear line to be

drawn between giants and the wild hairy wood-sprites.”²² These *incubi*, according to tradition, are offspring of Adam’s race and mysterious “female spirits”²³ —a further suggestion that the species of monster we are dealing with is now felt to be not merely *lusus natura*, part of the extravagance of creation, but a result of some perversion of creation brought about by a moral agency. Moreover, the suggestion of moral disturbance in the family history carries over, with explicit references, to the most frequent word for monster used by the *Beowulf* poet for Grendel—*feond*.

Feond is used in *Beowulf* eighteen times to describe Grendel, three times to speak of the dragon which finally defeats Beowulf, once to refer to some giants whom Beowulf met in a swimming match, once to mortal foes in the battle at Finnsburgh, and once to an unsavory human prince, Heremod. Omitting its reference to the dragon, all others are to humans or humanoid monsters of the sort represented by Grendel.²⁴ But despite the use of this term in later Middle English to mean “devil,” or literally, “fiend,” it has been sufficiently demonstrated that in Anglo-Saxon usage the term still had a wider use, meaning anything from “tyrant” to “monster” or *fenggi*.²⁵

Eoten (lines 112, 766) is fairly rare in Old English but quite common in Icelandic saga, where the *Völuspá* of the Poetic Edda contains seven references to the tribe of “giants.” It has human associations, yet is clearly linked not merely to Adam’s kin in general, but to the particular malfeasance of fallen men. Thus, for example, in the etymologies Old Norse *iötunn* and Anglo-Saxon *eoten* yield up *etensberg*, *hedensberg*, *hethensberg* as the name of an unpleasant mountain of moral exile.²⁶ Some of the sources cited by Grimm connect *eoten* with *ent* (“*ad giganteam viam, entisken wec*,” “*von enten swarz und grâ kan ich nit vil sagen*”).²⁷ But this further connection with woods and trees is not at all benign—we have the reference in Old Norse: “*iötun sâ er Brûsi hêti, hann var mikit tröll ok mann-aeta*” [a giant there was called Bruser, it seems a mighty troll or man-eater],²⁸ and the cannibalistic habit is certainly uppermost in the mind of the *Beowulf* poet as he locates Grendel’s “kinship” group for us, in describing his late-night visit to the sleeping court of Hrothgar:

wæs se grimma gæst Grendel hāten,
 mære mearcstapa, sē þe mōras hēold,
 fen ond fæsten; fifelcynnes eard
 wonsæli wer weardode hwile,
 sipðan him Scyppend forscifen hæfde
 in Cāines cynne— þone cwealm gewræc
 ēce Drihten, pæs þe hē Ābel slōg;

ne gefeah hē ƿære fæhðe, ac hē hine feor forwræc,
 Metod for ƿý mǣne mancynne fram.
 ƿanon untýdras ealle onwōcon,
 eotenas ond ylfe ond orcnéas,
 swylce gigantas, ƿā wið Gode wunnon
 lange ƿrāge; hē him ðæs lēan forgeald.

(*Beowulf*, lines 102–14)

[That grim spirit was called Grendel, the renowned traverser of the marches, who held the moors, the fen and fastness; unblessed creature, he dwelt for awhile in the lair of monsters after the Creator had condemned them. On Cain's kindred did the everlasting Lord avenge the murder, for that he had slain Abel; he had no joy of that feud, but the Creator drove him far from mankind for that misdeed. Thence all evil broods were born, ogres and elves and evil spirits—the giants also, who for a long time fought with God, for which he gave them their reward.]

In placing Grendel as “of the race of Cain” the poet at once accomplishes two things. First, he heightens our appreciation for the violation of hospitality and sanctuary which is taking place by alluding to a figure from biblical literature who is profoundly associated with such a violation. Secondly, by using Cain he applies specific Christian traditions concerning pollution of family order and outcast experience which at once strengthens the human character of Grendel and elevates the character of his depredation to that of a conscious moral agency. The passage comes immediately after a minstrel has sung a song in praise of creation. Grendel is a monster, yes, but one with human properties, despite all, who has reflective capacities, but who is committed, being of the kinship of Cain, against the kinship of those men who are responsive to the order of divine creation and God's redemption. He is also, however, as a member of *Caines cyn*, part of the order of monsters and unnatural births generally, in a clear suggestion that the agency of all such creational aberrations is to be seen as the moral evil figured in Cain—not the mere or neutral prolixity of creation. In fact, we are told that Grendel has been condemned.

Here we have a context for our *eoten*, or *skôgs-ra*, which is now overtly Christian, yet in which the monster is not any longer really part of the community of men. Like them he is *sāwlberendra* (line 1004), a soul-bearer, and reflective—he runs for the fens after his arm is wrenched out of its socket by Beowulf, wretched in spirit, with, as Stephen Bandy puts it, “the certainty

that his days were numbered and his life at an end."²⁹ He has a kinship grouping of his own, represented by his relationship to that awesome mother with whom he lives in the underwater cave. But his position is far from neutral as a son of Noah or Adam. In fact, he is now explicitly linked with the first blood-carnage, the first excommunication, and an archetypal, exiled, outcast state. This represents an important modification of the simple Augustinian tradition and is a metamorphosis which, in its responsiveness to the darker side of Germanic monster-lore, bears further examination.

A key to what has happened to the tradition may be available in a description of Cain's progeny which occurs in the Middle High German *Genesis* of the twelfth century. In it, the Germanic traditions of darker, more malevolent monstrosities may be seen to fuse with the gentler cultural anthropology of Augustinian and southern tradition to make of the various monsters—including a hairy *homo silvestris* whose eyes shine in the dark like Grendel's—creatures of the outcast sort:

. . . sumelich hieton hobet als ein hunt
 sumelich hieten an den brusten munt
 an den ahselen ogen
 dei musen sich des hobetes geloben;
 sumelich bedahten sich mit den oren
 wnderlich ist ez ze horen.
 Etlicher het einen fuz
 der was michel unde groz.
 der lief also balde
 sam ein tier datzze walde.
 Etlichir gebar ein chint
 duz gie an allen useren sam ein rint.
 Sumelich uleren begarwe
 (ir uil) schone uarwe,
 si werden swarz und eislich,
 (dem) do nich was gelich,
 dei ogen schinen in alle stunde
 die zene waren lanch in den munde;
 (swenne si) die liezzen plechen
 so mahten si den tieuil schrechen.
 alsolich leben liezzen die uer (chornen)
 al ir aftir chomen.
 Swic diese (inne) warin (getan)
 die geschafft musen diese ozzen han.³⁰

[Some had a head like a dog,
 some had their mouth on the chest
 and eyes on their shoulders:
 these were obliged to do without a head.
 Some thought with their ears
 (this is strange to hear!)
 one kind had a foot
 which was big and thick;
 he ran swiftly
 like an animal in the forest.
 One kind gave birth to a child
 which walks on all fours like a beast.
 Some are marked (garbed) in beautiful colour,
 some appear black and disgusting
 beyond comparison
 —the eyes glowed continuously,
 the teeth were angled in the mouth
 (and) when they flash them
 they (would) frighten the devil.
 Similarly did all their offspring
 use their teeth as weapons.
 Made as they were,
 the order of creation must keep them on the outside.]

This account bears an evident relationship to St. Augustine's discussions concerning similar creatures in *The City of God*—the same sorts of aberration are discussed. But the greater Germanic instinct for kinship purity could also find a corollary—with respect to gigantic monsters particularly—in Augustine. The reference in question comes in a passage not often noticed in Book XV of *The City of God*, almost immediately preceding the discussion of *genera homina monstrosa*. Suggesting that there is much fabulous or apocryphal literature about giants, Augustine acknowledges, in respect of Genesis 6:1–4, that there were indeed such creatures (and, by a contemporary example, still may be), but suggests that while their existence demonstrates, as with other monsters, the diversity of creation, it also affords us a specific sort of moral instruction. He says,

And it pleased the Creator to produce them, that it might thus be demonstrated that neither beauty, nor yet size and strength, are of much moment to the wise man, whose blessedness lies in spiritual and immortal blessings, in far better and more enduring gifts, in the good

things that are the peculiar property of the good, and are not shared by good and bad alike. It is this that another prophet confirms when he says, "These were the giants, famous from the beginning, that were of so great stature, and so expert in war. Those did *not* the Lord choose, neither gave He the way of Knowledge unto them; but they were destroyed because they had no wisdom, and perished through their own foolishness."³¹

Old King Hrothgar's sermon to Beowulf following his victory over the monsters, in which he gives advice on the wisdom of charity, now begins to take on force. In *Beowulf* it is by opposing the wisdom of God's order—and by implication, of human order—that Grendel and his dam have rejected wisdom for a foolishness of their own devising, through which they perish in their exiled state. Here the theological provision that some things of creational merit are shared only by the good, and not by "good and bad alike," would seem to reinforce the later Germanic association with an extra or anti-kinship role for monsters. Indeed, it is almost certainly on this basis that the tyrant Hygelac, one of the less happy warrior princes in *Beowulf*, actually gets included in the tenth century *Liber Monstrorum* along with creatures of the sort Augustine's Carthaginian pavements depict and the Middle High German *Genesis* describes as being of the race of Cain.³² Such creatures are considered as part of the family of man—they are *rationis capax*—but by their own rebellious choice they have chosen against wisdom and become incapable of compassion, relationship, and the society of ordinary persons. Thus, they now actively participate in their own exile and ultimately reflect the murderous sociopathology of their archetype Cain.

Yet there is more conflation here. The writer of the apocryphal *Baruch* does not actually mention Cain in this connection, neither does Augustine. The Middle High German *Genesis* does, as does *Beowulf*. And the connection that is made in the Germanic literature seems clearly to be with exile from the family, with an outcast state, then secondarily with murderousness when any social encounter occurs. Cain becomes an ideal figure for this conflation, standing as he does (in Jung's sense) on the shadow side of human reality. The Cain figure is responsive to strongly Germanic visions of the monstrous, embodying a perversion of human character and a threat to family solidarity such as is manifest in antagonists from the earliest Germanic tales, such as the trolls, orcs, *eotenas*, and *fenggi*. Thus it is that the potentially benign version of the monster from southern tales (Italian *orca*; Neapolitan *huorca*; French *ogre*)—who will as often protect and cheer up children they discover lost in the forest as eat them³³—or the tolerant inclusion of such monstrosities by St. Augustine in the normal canons of human communality are supplanted in the north by a Germanic concern for blood relationship and family

solidarity. These find a ready analogue in the story of Cain, the human who is rational and relational,³⁴ but fundamentally anti-cultural. In Germanic story, as in *Beowulf*, it becomes thus the triumph of family history and an act of cultural heroism to meet and eradicate such a creature.³⁵

The history of our medieval “Sasquatch” type begins to decline with the onset of the Renaissance. But Mandeville’s *Travels*, written in 1370, includes the conventional monstrosities listed by Pliny, Solinus, Isidore, and Augustine and still offers us a typical description of the *pyrs* or *skôgs-ra*:

And þei han no clothyng but of skynnes of bestes þat þey hange upon hem, And þei eten no breed, but all raw flesch & þei drynken mylk of bestes. . . . And þei haue none houses to lyen jnne. And þei eten more gladly mannes flesch panne any oþer flesch.³⁶

We have little trouble recognizing the creatures from the Tiberius and Cotton manuscript illustrations or *Beowulf* here. Yet, for all that, the description lacks the force it had earlier—it is as though a mere daily commonplace is offered, subject for a *moralté*. This impression, moreover, is strengthened when we read immediately following of another isle, inhabited by women who

ben of þat Kynde, þat ȝif þei beholden ony man with wratthe þei slen him anon with the beholdyng, as doth the Basilisk.³⁷

When we meet ladies who slay with a look, surely we cannot be very far from the ordinary world after all.

Mandeville, the fourteenth-century pseudo-geographer, did address one awkward question not dealt with by those earlier poets who made the Germanic *pyrs* a member of the race of Cain. It is this: how could Cain’s race have survived the flood? Augustine you will remember, made his panoply of aberrant species descendent from the sons of Noah and blessed them accordingly. Well, there is a clever trick involved here, one which ought to warn anthropologists against too much reliance upon those of us who pursue their subject via the shadowy routes of philology and etymology. After a description, in chapter twenty-four, of the court of the notorious Ghengis Khan (called in Middle English “the grete Chane”) Mandeville tells us why the historical Chane is so called:

ȝee schull vndirstonde þat all the world was destroyed be Noes flood

saf only Noe & his wif & his children. Noe had iij sones Sem, Cham & Iapeth. This Cam was he þat saugh his faderes preuy membres naked when he slepte & scorned hem . . . & perfore was cursed of god. . . . Cham was the grettest & the most myghty & of him camen mo generaciouns þan of the othere. And of his sone Chuse was engendered Membroth, the geaunt þat was the firste Kyng þat euer was in the world & he began the fundacioun of the tour of Babylone. And þat tyme the fendes of helle camen many tymes & leyen with the women of his generacioun & engendered on hem dyuerse folk as MONSTRES & folk disfigured. Summe withauten hedes, summe with grete eres, summe with on eye, summe geauntes, sum with hors feet & many oper of dyuerse schapp aʒenst kynde. And of þat generacioun of Cham ben comen the Paynemes. . . .³⁸

Here, by a not very subtle etymological play, Cain's lineage has been inserted into the family of Noah via Ham (Cham). The same conflation which has come to govern the role of monsters in earlier medieval saga now provides for a continuation, in quasi-biblical literature, of the race of Cain (Caym, Cane) as the generations of Chane (Cam, Caym). By late medieval times, in homilies and in biblical drama, the conflation is almost complete. It begins, however, in early Germanic folklore with the *skôgs-ra* or *pyrs*.

By the end of the Middle Ages the function of monsters is almost purely moral exegesis. The 175th tale of the *Gesta Romanorum*, "*De mirabilibus mundi*," gives an account of the full conventional listing, moralizing the dog-headed men as preachers, the people with an elephantine lower lip as symbols of humility, and so on. In a French translation of Thomas of Cantimpré's *Liber de monstrosis hominibus* the *cynocephali* are now transposed as symbols of calumny, "and the people without heads are the lawyers who take excessive fees in order to fill their bellies."³⁹ By the fifteenth century, in another manuscript of Cantimpré,⁴⁰ the monsters are all dressed up in the costume of a middle-class Flemish burgher (looking more or less like Smokey the Bear).

With the coming of the Renaissance itself, however, this moral allegorizing takes a sadder turn, and monstrous creatures begin to be interpreted in a literal, almost pagan way, as apocalyptic portents, harbingers, or ill omens of an end to come. There is a remarkable little volume by Pierre Boaistauau, entitled *Histoires Prodigieuses* which will repay reading by the historian of anthropology, from more than one point of view. Having something of a scholarly nature, it nevertheless has a tone about it which falls somewhere between the *Guinness Book of World Records* and the *National Enquirer*. Boaistauau first dedicated it hopefully to Queen Elizabeth in 1560, who re-

jected the book on sight. Although poor Boaistauau died six years later, three years after that the book was published again in London under the title *Histories of Wonderfull Secrets in Nature*. And on the subject of humanoid monsters, of which it has a great deal to say, this work takes a characteristically northern view:

It is most certaine, that these monstrous creatures for the most part do proceede of the judgment, justice, chastisement and curse of God, which suffreth that the fathers and mothers bring forth these abominations, as a horreur of their sinne, suffering themselves to run headlong, as do brute beasts without guide, to the puddle and stinke of their filthie appetites, having no respecte or regard to the age, place, tyme or other lawes ordeined of Nature . . .⁴¹

Boaistauau illustrates his work at this point with two such humanoid monsters standing before a sixteenth-century king or emperor (Plate 12)—ill omens of some fate the king cannot apparently construe.

But the tone of Boaistauau's work is indicative of the development of monster study at the end of the period. As Wittkower has shown, even Lycosthenes's work "leads away from cosmologies and encyclopaedias and back into the world of magic." He concludes:

We are faced with the curious paradox that the superstitious Middle Ages pleaded in a broad minded spirit for the monsters as belonging to God's inexplicable plan of the world, while the "enlightened" period of humanism returned to Varro's 'contra naturam' and regarded them as creations of God's wrath to foreshadow extraordinary events.⁴²

We might now wish to correct Wittkower's synopsis with the evidence of Northern European literature in the Middle Ages; as we have seen, that mythological history does not accord with Augustine's famous passage either. But the point he attempts to make, interesting in the southern and Renaissance context, may also cast light on another, more contemporary question involving even our present conference.

I refer to the phenomenology of our subject. In the work of Boaistauau just cited there is a special chapter given over to one type of humanoid monster, having as the incipit says "the shape of the face of a man, who was taken

in the forrest of Haueberg, in the yere 1531. Whose portrait Georgius Fabritus sent to Gesnerus, drawn naturally, as he is here figured."⁴³ The account is introduced with solemn promises of scholarly accuracy and integrity, and the citation of Gesnerus' *De quadrupedibus viuiparis* in particular, which records:

that in the forest of *Saxonie* in the coast of Dace, there was taken certaine monstrous beasts, having the shape of a face of a man, whereof the female in chase by chaunce was killed of hunters, and the male taken by them, was brought alive, who afterwards became domesticall, and tame, in such sorte as he began to talke a little, albeit hys words were imperfect and hoolt, much like unto a Goate: and touching the rest of his actions, they were more brutall than humaine. For at such time as he was moved by the ardent heates and motions of nature, the women were not in safety with him, for he would endeavor himselfe by force to violate them openly. And as another like to this, was taken in the yere 1531 in the Forest *de la seigneurie de Salcebourg* in *Almaine*, who wold never be made tame, nor yet endure the loke of a man; but living in such sorte certaine dayes, in the ende died of hunger, refusing to be fed of any living creature.⁴⁴

Whether with the extrovert or the introvert, by 1531 we are well away from the purely literary mythology of humanoid monsters and into material which must at least interest the naturalist. Moreover, we appear to be dealing here not merely with an individual case, but with a whole species. The account goes on:

Even so in the time that Iames the fourth king raigned in *Scotland*, which was in the yere 1409 . . . he sent *Iacobus Egilinus* in embassage to the French king, who by tempest of the seas was cast on land in a certaine Isle of *Norway*, where he saw monsters like unto these spoken of before, as he witnessed at his return: and enquiring of the people of that countrey what kinde of creatures they were, they answered, that they were certaine beasts having the shape of the face of men, who accustomed very often to come by night to their houses, which being not repulsed by dogges, would devour as well their men as children.⁴⁵

Were these creatures reported by naturalists and ambassadors then of the

same species as Grendel and his dam? The drawing, by Fabritius originally, hardly makes it seem so: the poet's description and the illustrations of humanoid monsters found in the same manuscript are all clearly much more anthropoid. But there is an interesting parallel to this drawing in Thévet,⁴⁴ where in fact a chimpanzee or gorilla was rendered by that notably competent naturalist in almost the same way: although he was looking at an anthropoid ape, Thévet *saw* a medieval manticore, a mythological creature from the bestiaries and travel books with which he was familiar. It seems likely that the same phenomenological operation could have governed the drawing by Fabritius reproduced by Boaistauau, and that the creature depicted here as a variant of the manticore may have, in actuality, just as much resembled Tulp's *homo silvestris* or the Tiberius manuscript monstrous humanoids (Plates 10 and 11). The problem that confronts everyone working with rare phenomena, one supposes, is that he is too likely to see what he is looking for, rather than what is there.

The question which continually dogs medieval as well as renaissance and modern students of the subject is whether or not such creatures actually participate in the human condition. It is fitting, from the point of prospect in this essay at any rate, that Boaistauau should conclude his remarkable chapter as follows:

And I remember that S. Augustine in his booke of the Citye of God, maketh mention of sundrye monsters of straunge formes, who were founde in deserts or elsewhere, whereupon grew a question, whether they were descended of the first man Adam, or that they had a reasonable soule or not, or whether they sould rise as others shall at the generall day of resurrection.⁴⁷

By way of conclusion, we have seen that the Grendel figure, or *pyrs*, *eoten*, *skôgs-ra*, has two aspects or lines of lineage by the time of the Beowulf poet. As a descendant of those manifold Germanic monsters—*skôgs-ra*, *pyrs*, *bergrisar*, *orcneas*, or *iviðr*—he is an evil force representing a threat to society from outside its moral and domestic order. As a descendant of Augustine's *genera homina monstrosa* he is a descendant of Noah and actually part of the family. But for all that, as a descendant particularly of Cain (or Cham) he becomes an outcast from the family, forced outside Christian moral and domestic order. He is rational and reflective, but a rebel against either or both aspects of the order open to him. Thus he comes to dramatize factors which are spiritually negative on all counts. He is therefore, for early medie-

val society, truly a "shadow," representative of a force which must be overcome.

Notes

- * The following phonetic values should be associated with the orthography of the Northern languages represented in this article: þ—th as in "thin"; ð—th as in "thine"; æ—resembling the vowel in "bat."
1. Translation from Marcus Dods, *The Works of Aurelius Augustine*, Vol. 2: *The City of God*, Vol. 2 (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark 1871), 116–17. This position is one held to, even late in the Middle Ages, by a theologian comparably oriented to Scripture, John Wyclif, in his *De logica* (London, 1893), pp. 170–71. Wyclif is conscious, however, that his position is more biblical than cultural by the late fourteenth century.
 2. *City of God*, XVI, 8, p. 118.
 3. *The Geography of Strabo*, trans. H.C. Hamilton (London: G. Bell and Sons, 1912), vol. 2, book I, chap. 9.
 4. Edited and translated by B. Thorpe (London, 1853).
 5. M.R. James, ed. *Marvels of the East* (Oxford: Roxburghe Club, 1929).
 6. Ratramus: "De Gigantibus vero qui inter hæc povtenta numerantur, homines fuisse de hominibus natos nemo fere qui dubitet, quando quidem divinarum auctoritate litterarum, hoc astrui non ignoremus," *Epistola de Cynocephalis*, *Patrologia Latina* 121, cols. 1155–56.
 7. *Beowulf*, ed. Fr. Klaeber (London, 1923), 11.740–55. Where translations occur they are from J.R. Clark Hall, as revised by C.L. Wrenn and J.R.R. Tolkien (London: Allen and Unwin, 1950).
 8. From the 1624 edition, Vol. I, Lib. 1, c.64; also Lib.31, c.118–27; also Lib.4, c.24; c.131.
 9. M.C. Seymour, ed., *On the Properties of Things*: John Trevisa's Translation of *Bartholomæus Anglicus, De proprietatibus rerum*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975).
 10. See the excellent article by Rudolf Wittkower, "Marvels of the East: a study in the history of monsters," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 5 (1942), 159–97, to which, along with James' edition, I am much indebted.
 11. Wittkower, "Marvels," p. 170.
 12. *Mandeville's Travels*, Vol. I, ed. P. Hamelius (London: Early English Text Society, 1919), p. 30.
 13. Nicolaus Tulpus, *Obesevationum Medicarum Libri Tres* (Amsterdam, 1641), cap. 56, p. 247ff. See Wittkower, "Marvels," p. 191.
 14. See Jacob Grimm, *Teutonic Mythology*, trans. J.S. Stallybrass (London: G. Bell 1882), vol. 1, 434; 4, 1406 and 1427 [compare Grendel's hairyness—11. 1647–48]. Notker's Chronicle, in 1000, still pictures the maneating *hazessa* as part of Saxon realities—*Patrologia Latina* 89, col. 870.
 15. Karl Helm, *Altgermanische Religionsgeschichte*, Vol. 2 ("Die Westgermanen") (Heidelberg, 1953), writes:

Der Wald, in alter Zeit ein unwirtlicher Aufenthalt, ist der Bereich riesiger wilder Männer und der zahlreicheren wilden Frauen. Sie sind gross wie Bäume; ihr Aussehen ist schreckhaft, oft sehen sie selbst wie die Bäume aus. Einsam hausen sie im Wald, Verirrte festhaltend, der Hexe im Märchen von Hansel und Gretel vergleichbar (p. 97).

[The forest, which in ancient times was an inhospitable environment, is the kingdom of giant wild men and countless wild women. They are big as trees; their appearance is terrifying and often they even look like trees. They hole up alone in the woods, persevering in aberrant life like the witch in the fairy-tale of Hansel and Gretel.]

16. Grimm, 4, 1427; 2, 487.
17. Compare the Gothic neuter *skôhsl* (devil?), *skôhs* or *skôgs*, which Grimm relates to Old Norse *skôgr* (silva). He suggests (2, 487) that *scheusal* (monstrum) may come from *scheuen*, to shy at.
18. *Menologium seu Calendarium Poeticum, ex Hiccesiano Thesauro*, ed. S. Fox (London, 1830), 1.545.
19. *Altergermanische* p. 89; see also Grimm, *Teutonic Mythology*, 2, 486.
20. Renauld-Krantz, *Structures de la mythologie nordique* (Paris, 1972), 234ff.
21. "New Aspects of the Monsters in *Beowulf*," (Ph.d. diss. University of Wisconsin, 1967), p. 11.
22. Grimm, *Teutonic Mythology*, 2, 553.
23. *Thesauvus Paleohibernicus* 1:2, 1.5.
24. Stephen C. Bandy, "Caines Cyn: A study of *Beowulf* and the Legends of Cain," (Ph.d. diss. Princeton University, 1967), p.104. But see his article, "Christliche Eschatologie und alterglische Dichtung, dargestellt am Beispiel des *Beowulf*," *Germanisch, Romanische Monatsscher* 26 (1973): 19-25.
25. M.P. Hamilton, "The Religious Principle in *Beowulf*," *Publications of the Modern Language Association* 61 (1946): 321-22.
26. Grimm, *Teutonic Mythology*, 4, 1437. See also Helm, *Altgermanische*, pp. 90-92.
27. Grimm, *Teutonic Mythology*, 4, 1438. *Ad giganteam viam* [in the giants' path] translates as *entisken wec; von enten swarz und gra kan ich nit vill sagen* as "of the big black giants I can't speak well."
28. *Ibid.*, 1447.
29. Bandy, "Caines Cyn," p. 93.
30. *Genesis und Exodus*, ed. Joseph Diemer (Vienna, 1862), p. 26.
31. Augustine, *City of God*, XV, 23, pp. 96-7. The Scriptural reference is to the Apocrypha, Baruch 3:26-28.
32. *Liber Monstrorum*, ed. Moriz Haupt (Berlin, 1663).
33. Grimm, *Teutonic Methology*, 2, 486.
34. In fact, *chanach* himself, in Genesis, is said, ironically, to be the founder of cities.
35. The sense of a need for encounter is not as strong in the Alexander romances, for example, which are earlier and where the matter is largely southern. But it is still a factor in later romance literature from northern Europe, as, for example, in Arthur's encounter with the Monster of Mont St. Michel.
36. Mandeville, *Travels*, p. 189.
37. *Ibid.*, p. 190.
38. *Ibid.*, ch. xxv, p. 163.
39. Wittkower, "Marvels," p. 178. His discussion of the Renaissance reinterpretations here is very helpful.
40. Manuscript Bruges, codex 411.
41. Pierre Boaistauau, *Histoires of Wonderfull Secrets in Nature* (London, 1569), p. 12v.
42. Wittkower, "Marvels," p. 186:
43. Boaistauau, *Histoires*, p. 110v.
44. *Ibid.*,
45. *Ibid.*, p. 111v.
46. André Thévet, *Cosmographie universelle* (Paris, 1575) I, 52.
47. Boaistauau, *Histoires*, p. 111v.

Similiter ibi nascuntur cenoccephali quos
nos conopocinas appellamus habentes subas
equorum. ap. rum dentes. cumna capita igne
& flamma flantes hie. curas uiana dicit om
mo: bonis pleua dextiore parte ducit illa
per abaeq. pro.
Eac ppylce þar i broð cende healfhundin gar da
þendon hatene conopocinas. In habbad hoþer
manian þo þer tucay þunda heapda 7
heoþa oþud byð ppylce þi þoþer þar land broð
neah dā þunzū þe broð rallū þo þu dō þe lū geþylled
þi rād healf æt gþr nalandes.

On sumon lande broð menn aþende. Sab
on lenge þi þoþer la lange in habbad þe
oþer oþer þe þe ar oð he la n homo dubi h
þendon hatene þi broð ppylce þe he þe ar
þe ceon in libbad þa etad.

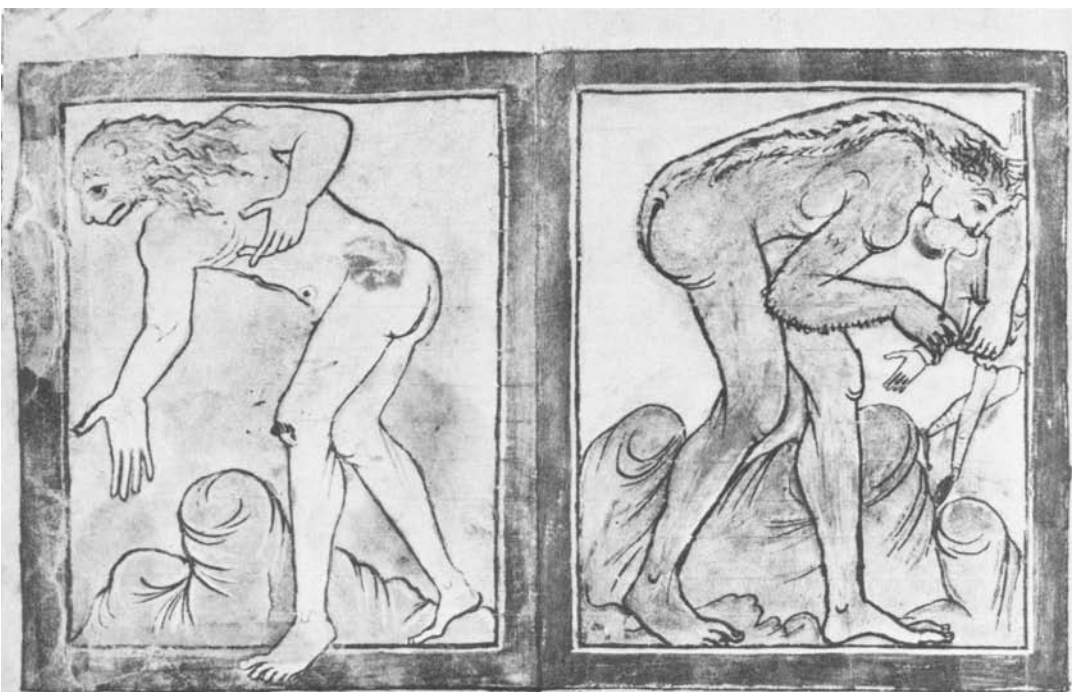


Malicia nascuntur homines statura pedu
vi. barbas habentes usq. ad genua. comas
usq. ad talos qui homo dicitur appellantur
& pisces crudos manducant.



Capifluuius in eodē loco appellat gorgon
ibi nascunt formice statura canū habent
pedes qsi locaste rubro colore nigroq. fodie
aurū. & quod pnoctem fodiunt sub terra.
pferant foras usq. diei horā quinta. Homines
autem qui auidaces sunt illud tollere. Sic
tollunt apud camelos masculos & feminas illas
que habent foetas. foetas aut trans flumen
gargulum alligatos relinquunt & camelos for
mice aurum imponunt. Ille aut pietate ad
suos pullos festinantes. ibi masculi remanent.

Plate 10. Illustration from an eleventh-century manuscript in the British Library shows medieval versions of manlike monsters. David Lyle Jeffrey discusses the European tradition of manlike monsters on pages 47-64.



Tras brixoncem flumen ad orientem nascuntur
homines longi & magni habentes femora &
suras. xii. pedum latera cum pectore. virpe
dum colore nigro q̄s hostes nre appellam.
Nā q̄s cūq; capiunt comedunt. :-

Brecondan brixoncem dāne ea east danon
beodmen acende lange p̄micle þa habbað
p̄e p̄mican c̄p̄e p̄p̄a lange p̄idan mid
b̄eop̄um p̄eop̄an p̄a lange hi beoð p̄p̄eap̄
t̄er h̄p̄er þi p̄yndan hoſt̄er nemde.
Caðlice p̄p̄a h̄p̄ylene manni p̄p̄a h̄gep̄oð
þonne p̄p̄eas hi hine :-

Sunt & alie bestiolar in brixoncem quae
leraces apellatur aurib; asinini suellere
ouino pedib; ouum :-

Fonne p̄yndon on brixoncem p̄ildeop̄
þa h̄aſtan leſtices hi habbað c̄p̄eſeſ
c̄p̄ian p̄p̄eap̄er pulle p̄p̄aſeſ p̄e :-



Plate 11. Note the variety of creatures, which range from the gentle eaters of fruit and fish (Plate 10) to this lion-headed man and maneating monster.